

The Tripoli CG held another meeting with local tribal leaders in order to facilitate the restoration of local security and the resumption of services. These meetings were to continue on a daily basis to both highlight Tripoli's requests for assistance in establishing a local government, and to build rapport with the leaders. There were a large number of tribal leaders, and the Task Force assembled lists of the names, cross-checking them with the list of wanted Iraqi war criminals. Several rival tribal leaders accused each other of having intelligence contacts in the old Regime or of hiding Regime officials, and the HET teams aggressively worked to exploit this internal friction to gain information on the whereabouts of Regime figures who remained at large. The CG established a Tribal Council, assisted by the local professionals who had come forward to offer assistance in restoring electricity and water services to the city.

One of the first orders of business was the disestablishment of vigilante checkpoints. The Sheikhs had returned from the meeting the day before, and had instructed their people to set up independent checkpoints outside and out of sight of the Marine checkpoints. The stated intent of these checkpoints was to keep non-locals from looting the homes of local residents, but these unauthorized checkpoints took on a more sinister form. That morning, while traveling south along Highway 1, HET 11, under Warrant Officer Shawn Dunn, discovered four hasty checkpoints, each manned by approximately 40 individuals. A zigzag pattern of broken furniture



A Marine Human Exploitation Team disbands a vigilante checkpoint.

and garbage was set at each point, and the men manning the point were armed with clubs, metal rods, and specially constructed batons with rubber tips designed for body beatings. At one checkpoint, a burned out car was located fifty feet from the zigzag and the men were in the process of smashing the windshield of a car stopped in the center. An elderly couple was cowering in the car. Without hesitation, the five members of the HET waded into the much larger crowd. The HET team stopped the attack, seized the weapons, and interrogated the attackers. At this checkpoint, and at each subsequent point, the ringleaders were former policemen claiming that they had received orders to establish the points by the tribal leaders at the behest of the Americans (this order was never given). Local vigilantes stated they had established these checkpoints for local security against looters and to prevent people coming from out of town to steal from their homes. Despite vigorous denials to the contrary, the thugs manning the checkpoints appeared to be stealing goods from the cars that passed through. The checkpoints were broken apart and the men were ordered to disperse.

These vigilante checkpoints were indicative of the lawlessness and fear that characterized much of Iraq in the interval between the end of the Baath regime and the restoration of law and order. In the period immediately following the liberation of Tikrit, the city police force had ceased to function, as officers changed into civilian clothes and fled into the countryside. The Task Force received numerous reports of reprisal killings and beatings from local citizens. Difficulties in re-starting the electrical plant left the area in darkness, facilitating looting and the activities of former regime paramilitary forces. Responding to the general lawlessness, Lieutenant Colonel White, CO of 1st LAR Battalion, began the creation of a civilian police organization to help restore order. Because many former police officers had committed human rights violations during the previous regime, 1st LAR set up a careful screening process for new police recruits. Within 24 hours of the initial meeting, the first traffic police recruits were on the streets, standing at checkpoints alongside the Marines. Expanding this small force into a larger, better-trained organization would fall to the relieving force once Tripoli departed.



The international media was everywhere in Tikrit.

While patrolling and escorting tribal leaders on the east side of the Tigris River, members of the Task Force command element were approached by agitated locals who stated that "Kurds" had murdered someone just up the road. When the patrol element reached the incident site, they discovered a small sedan taxi with numerous bullet holes in the windshield. The passenger was dead with wet blood on his face, and the driver was bleeding from glass fragment wounds. The distraught driver stated that four Kurds in a white pickup truck had attacked them. The Task Force Command element conducted a high-speed pursuit of the

reported vehicle, but was unable to catch up to it. As the patrol moved past another intersection, another dead body was observed on the side of the road to the northeast. It was clear that to the east of the Tigris, the breakdown of law and order was having a chaotic effect. The Task Force continued to find examples of lawlessness throughout the countryside. Despite the local practice of blaming any disruptive activity on 'Kurds', most of the violence appeared to be perpetrated by the locals themselves. The breakdown of law in the countryside made it possible for locals to engage in the revenge killings, tribal disputes, and vendettas that were much a part of the local culture. Local civilians with pickup trucks were observed raiding a food warehouse and a grain storage facility. Although the local leaders continued to vehemently blame this behavior on outsiders and 'Kurds', this did not appear to be the case. A few of the more trustworthy tribal leaders accompanying the patrol confirmed this assessment. Restoring law and order to the Iraqis was going to be a challenge.

Second LAR continued with its operations on the northern side of town. One of the Battalion's primary objectives was the massive Al Sahra air base on the northwest side of Tikrit.



The excesses of Saddam's palaces shocked many Marines.

When 'Barbarian' moved to clear this compound, they discovered vast revetment fields full of abandoned equipment. After scattering the ineffectual resistance in the area, they also discovered large warehouses containing everything from intact new (2002) French Roland missiles, to new Russian-made aerial cluster bombs. The Battalion reported the equipment, destroyed what they could, and documented the rest. Full clearing of this compound would require weeks of effort. Al Sahra was one of the facilities passed down to the relieving force when they arrived.

17 April The Shadow Regime

There was never a dull moment on security in Tikrit. The locals responded well to the confident but non-aggressive posture of the Marines:

The Marines of 1st Platoon (Red Platoon), Company A (Apache Company) had the responsibility of establishing and operating an entry control point (ECP) on the northern main service road leading into Tikrit. Sergeant Timothy L. Williams, Mojave Valley, Arizona (Fort Mojave Indian Tribe) was the man on the scene. "The first few vehicles through the ECP were kind of hostile," recalled the sergeant, "but once they got used to us they were all pretty friendly." As the Marines conducted vehicle searches, Sergeant Williams noted that the occupants of the vehicles began to help them by teaching his Marines the Iraqi translations for trunk, hood, door, and other terms that would help his Marines in their mission. "The locals hospitality flowed the longer we were there." "They brought us pita bread, fresh eggs, and veggies." The Iraqis became so comfortable with Sergeant Williams and his Marines that when asked if they had weapons, would lift up their 'man dresses' and show the blushing Marines that they were not in fact armed.

More disturbing than the overt violence and lawlessness were the unambiguous signs gathered by the Task Force indicating the presence of a 'Shadow Regime' in the greater Tikrit area. The old power elite remained active in the areas that Marines were not physically present. The Shadow Regime no longer had governance over the population, but clearly still retained the levers of power in the countryside. Thirty years of brutal dictatorship had left the Iraqi people incapable of independent actions in the absence of specific government direction and approval,

and they retained a visceral fear of the former Regime. Organized anti-US/Coalition meetings were being held in outlying areas and secluded parts of the city. At these meetings, the former Regime members and Baathists organized a campaign to threaten the local populace with death if they cooperated with the efforts of the Marines. The 'Shadow Regime' was not a monolithic and centrally controlled opposition force, but instead was a loosely organized threat from former regime power brokers, coordinated primarily by a similar desire to return to their days in power. These men still wielded significant control over the local populace through fear and intimidation, and operated at the fringes of the areas under the Marine's control.

The Shadow Regime recognized its own inability to exercise military power against US forces, and had adjusted its tactics to work against the populace behind the scenes. By doing so, it sought to quietly undermine US efforts without provoking a military response. The Shadow

Regime posed a direct and present threat to the stability and the success of any future government. The actions and tactics observed by Task Force Tripoli would prove a reliable forecast of the actions of the last Regime holdouts, and a large number of other parties vying for power in the post-Saddam government.

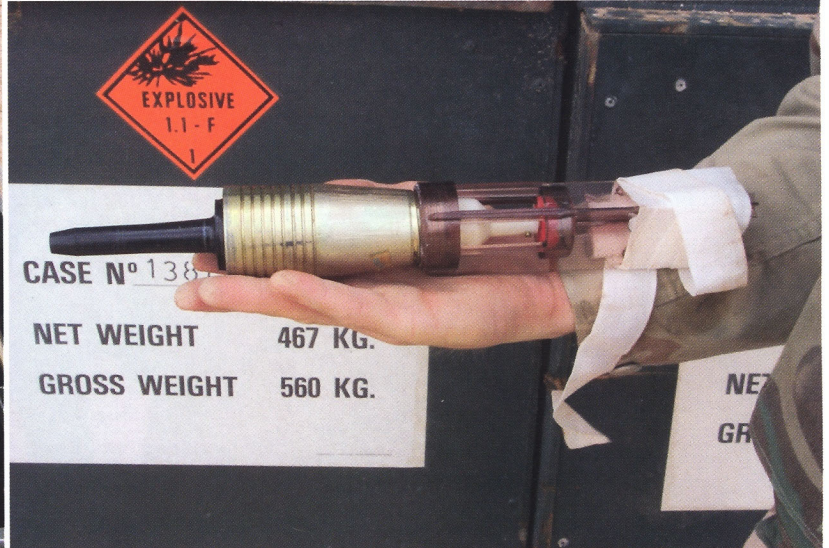
The contribution of the Task Force's two HET teams continued to be a significant force multiplier. These Marines were seemingly everywhere, exploiting sources on the bridge, breaking up vigilante roadblocks, investigating local authority figures, and tracking down former Regime members who were part of the Shadow Regime that was working at cross purposes with the Task Force. The HET teams of Lieutenant Nathan Boaz and Warrant Officer Shawn Dunn were among the most important elements of the task force. These Marines worked tirelessly, often in dangerous situations, to serve as a go-between for the Task Force CG and the locals.



Locals help identify areas where the Shadow Regime remained in control.



Weapons caches included everything from small arms to Roland missiles and cluster bombs.



18 April
The 'Attack' to Bayji



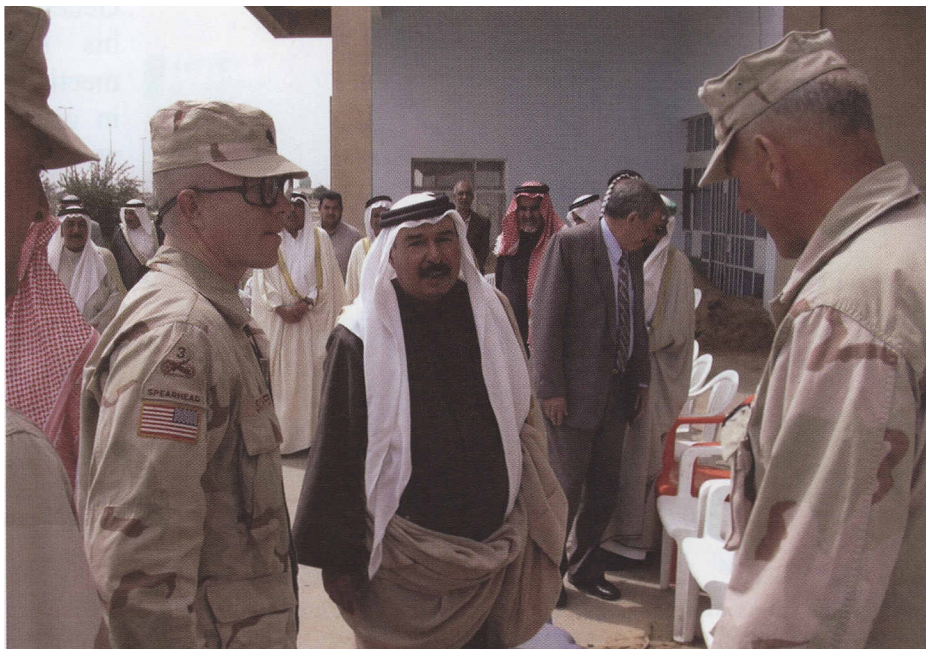
General Kelly congratulates the newly appointed Police Chief in Bayji.

Shadow Regime members notwithstanding, the situation in Tikrit increasingly became more stable. Capitalizing on the developing relationship with Fahran Al-Sudaïd, a sheikh whose tribe included the areas north of Tikrit, Brigadier General Kelly coordinated a meeting with the tribal leaders of Bayji, a town approximately 40 km north of Tikrit. The arrangement, coordinated with Captain Connable's assistance, would help return the greater Tikrit area to a state of relative normalcy. There had been, as yet, no US forces entering the Bayji urban area. Demonstrating extreme trust in the relationship he had established with Fahran Al-Sudaïd, the CG dictated that only a single LAR company accompany him, his staff, and Mr. Al-Sudaïd to the center of Bayji.

The 'diplomatic' mission to Bayji was successful in all regards. No contact with hostile forces occurred (although a roadside arms bazaar was broken up by the Tripoli staff along the way) and a broad range of local leaders and citizenry attended the town meeting held in the center of the city. After delivering a liberation speech with the assistance of Al-Sudaïd and Gunnery Sergeant Camille Hamadani from HET 11, Brigadier General Kelly approved the establishment of a locally elected council and police chief. The Task Force staff set communications and contact procedures with the council. Bayji was liberated with smiles and handshakes instead of with preparatory fires and tank main gun fire.

In addition to bringing Bayji under Task Force control, significant steps were taken to reduce former Regime presence in Tikrit and restore services to the populace. From the second day in Tikrit, the Marines of CSSC-Tripoli were purifying 20,000 gallons of sweet water from the Tigris River daily, and distributing it at five locations in the city. Major Estepp (CAG) continued

to work closely with tribal leaders to coordinate the restoration of electrical power, moving two large cranes into the city from an outlying Kurdish area to assist in the repair of downed lines. After the local leadership had failed to do so, the Task Force CG ordered all images of Saddam Hussein in the town destroyed. Before initiating this action, however, he insisted that the local leadership request assistance in destroying the images. The local leadership had hesitated to take the initiative upon themselves out of fear that Saddam or his remaining local henchmen would return and deal harshly with them. They had come to trust the Marines, however, and now asked for their help. To keep this from becoming a mad exercise in vandalism, the CG assigned the task specifically to 1st LAR Battalion, who began what would become an ongoing and labor-intensive task with the assistance of EOD, CSSC, and HET Marines.



Marines conducted a turnover with the US Army, introducing the local leadership to the Army officers.

19-21 April Relief in Tikrit

Task Force Tripoli was soon to be relieved by elements of the US Army's 4th Infantry Division. The lead elements of this Division began to arrive in Tikrit on the 19th, and were given a thorough orientation to the peaceful situation in town, and the continuing exercise in self-governance being worked with local leaders. This advance party gained an appreciation for the peaceful situation, and was pleased to take the word to their higher headquarters. The follow-on staff of the US 4th Infantry Division had a different perspective on the situation. The US 4th ID had missed the combat phase of OIF, and were determined to have a share in the 'fighting'. They characterized their recent road march to Tikrit (in trace of the Marines) as an 'attack', and remained convinced that the situation in Tikrit required a very stern military enforcement posture. The dichotomy between the two peacekeeping strategies was unsettling for the Marines, and many winced when Army Apache attack helicopters swooped in to the Division battlespace without coordination, and began to strafe seemingly indiscriminately on abandoned enemy armor directly between, and in close proximity to, 2^d and 3^d LAR's positions. Fortunately, they missed the LAVs. The Marine foot patrols, without flak vests and in soft covers, were replaced with menacing and physically destructive M1A2's and Bradley fighting vehicles on the streets. Stores

that had reopened quickly closed back up as the people once again evacuated the streets, adjusting to the new security tactics. A budding cooperative environment between the citizens and American forces was quickly snuffed out. The new adversarial relationship would become a major source of trouble in the coming months.



The MEF Commander addressed the Marines in Tikrit and informs them of the end of full-scale combat operations.

On 19 April, Brigadier General Kelly and members of his staff conducted a final meeting with Fahren Al-Sudaid in order to further the ongoing working relationship and attempt a turnover with incoming 4th Infantry Division officers. At the invitation of Mr. Al-Sudaid, Kurdish and Arab tribal leaders from north of Baiji to the border areas with Syria and Turkey attended the combination meeting and traditional feast in order to initiate diplomatic contact with the Coalition. The design was to use this opportunity to pass down relationships based on trust and mutual respect for each other's agendas that had begun to

blossom between tribal leaders and the Marines. Here was a tremendous opportunity to secure the peaceful cooperation of the northern Iraqi tribes. The meeting was successfully concluded, with plans for future contact with the northern tribes established. The meeting might have been even more productive had senior officers from 4th Infantry Division been willing to attend.

Third LAR had already been relieved of its battlespace in Tikrit, and sent back down to Samarra on 17 April. Wolfpack had relieved RCT 5 in Samarra, allowing the RCT to return to assume stabilization missions to the south in Ad Diwaniyah and As Samawah. Wolfpack resumed their former zone and watched as the peaceful Samarra countryside returned to normal. The peace was shattered on 19 April, as the US 4th Infantry Division attacked past their positions and deep into Tripoli's battle space. Wolfpack hunkered down at the sound of chain guns and .50 caliber machineguns, trying to avoid becoming friendly fire casualties. Apache attack helicopters were roving up and down the highway destroying military equipment, reopening military actions in an area that had been peacefully secured. Citizens who had been rejoicing in their new-found freedom were sent back, cowering in fear at this unexplained change in American tactics.

On this day, the Division CG's intentions message recorded the following lessons learned:

A critical lesson emerging in our handoff with V Corps is the mission essential requirement for dismounted infantry in civil-military ops. As we hand off our portion of Baghdad as well as the city of Tikrit, the lack of Army dismounts is creating a void in personal contact and public perception of our civil-military ops. Our forces need to project confidence in the security environment we have created. That is best exemplified in light, mobile force in contact with the local citizenry, sans helmets and flak jackets where appropriate, and without armored vehicles. If we cannot engender friendship and confidence in the local security environment, we cannot set the conditions for good order integral to a return to civil control. Future force structure analysis groups must recognize this imperative prior to cutting infantry from our Table of Organization. Mattis sends.

These words would prove prophetic, as later incidents in other parts of Iraq would demonstrate that a standoffish, overbearing occupation force would serve to alienate rather than endear the local populace. The individual discipline and overall numbers of dismounted Marine infantry proved well suited to the duties of both controlling and supporting a newly liberated people. Throughout Blue Diamond's zone, tanks and AAVs were rapidly withdrawn from use as firm and friendly Marines shifted to truck-borne and dismounted patrols.

Despite some misgivings about the danger posed to the peaceful civilians by the differing philosophies of the two American units, Task Force Tripoli carried out the relief in place with the US Army 4th Infantry Division from 19-21 April. The Task Force elements began to move south by echelon on 19 April as the Division Main CP displaced from Baghdad to Ad

